DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 153 EA 013 871

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TITLE Democratic Leadership by Managing Meetings for Effective Group Decision-Making.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 48p.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Conflict Resolution; *Decision Making; *Democratic Values; *Leadership; Leadership Styles; *Meetings; Planning
IDENTIFIERS *Consensus; Delphi Technique; Nominal Group Technique; *Participative Decision Making

ABSTRACT

Instrumental to successful democratic leadership is the use of committees to solve management problems. In democratic leadership, a leader encourages participation and uses a guidance approach to direct a group toward consensus. This document offers leaders guidelines in effective democratic management of meetings. The authors first discuss the decision to hold a meeting, noting that meetings are best held to gain acceptance of a decision, draw on expertise, or coordinate follow-up activities. They then review planning for meetings, including agenda preparation, participant selection, and physical arrangements. Guidelines are listed for leading and evaluating meetings, chairing committees, and handling nonparticipants and hecklers. Conflict in meetings is examined; the authors recommend dealing with it early and openly, preferably through consensus. They point out the dangers of "groupthink," or excessive likemindedness, and describe both its symptoms and techniques for counteracting it, such as the Delphi and nominal group techniques. An appendix presents the Consensus Management Readiness Test, which allows leaders to compare their current administrative styles with democratic leadership. (Author/RW)

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# DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP BY MANAGING MEETINGS FOR EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION-MAKING

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APRIL, 1981

EA 013 871

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# DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP BY MANAGING MEETINGS FOR EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION-MAKING

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## ABSTRACT

Instrumental to any successful democratic leadership is the use of committees as a means for solving management problems. A committee for group decision-making is a cluster of three or more people at any level of the organization on whom is thrust the responsibility of choosing between alternatives and making a decision.

A meeting for group decision-making serves the greatest advantage when management is more concerned with getting acceptance of a decision, when the expertise of specialists is needed, or when coordination of action to follow up a solution is necessary.

Planning is probably the most crucial aspect of meeting management. Agenda preparation should involve input from prospective participants; it should reflect what is expected to be accomplished and define goals. Participant selection sets the stage for effective or ineffective interaction. There are arguments for the advantages of both heterogenous and homogenous participant clusters. Group size of five participants seems to be the most effective for the intellectual task of decision-making. Equal distant seating patterns produce better quality decisions with greater speed, and foster greater consensus.

Strong, positive leadership that can control a group while not imposing the leader's view points on participants is desired character-

istic of a meeting manager or democratic leader. The effective leader knows the objectives of the committee, can vary decision-making strategies according to the task and participant characteristics, has achieved acceptance by group members, and has the skill to divert the group from unrelated discussion.

The effective leader can use the potential for conflict to achieve high quality decisions, and should try to work toward consensus as opposed to a majority vote. Of equal concern is the phenomenom of groupthink that results from the insulation of a homogenous group from outside conflicting viewpoints and produces unrealistic decisions. Various techniques can be applied to prevent groupthink but must be used with an understanding of their drawbacks.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

An area that is rapidly evolving within the management team structure has been the democratic group leadership style. The leader in a democratic group uses a guidance approach to direct the group while maximizing for flexibility. He or she often acts as a catalyst for the group and learns along with the group. The leader in a group tends to motivate group discussion and keeps its attention focused on the problem. The group leader also encourages each member to participate fully.

On the other hand, a good democratic group tends to be self motivated while selecting its own problems to be studied and objectives to be achieved. This is usually followed by a group planning process. A good democratic group allows leadership to emerge on specific issues and is primarly interested in all individuals ideas. There is often an atmosphere of freedom that allows each member to express his feelings, yet continuing to focus group attention upon the task at hand. The final test of success is the productivity of the group.[1]

One of the most important means of implementing democratic leadership is through effective group decisions within properly managed meetings. One fact of management life that for many administrators rivals paperwork in popularity - meetings. Although essential for everything from coordination of routine departmental functions to policy making, meetings can be the most boring unproductive aspect of a leader's job.

The further one rises in the organizational hierarchy, the more time is spent in meetings. In the nursing home, for example, a Director of Nurses will attend Medical Meetings, Pharmaceutical Meetings, Department Head Meetings, Professional and Nonprofessional Staff Meetings, Patient Care Planning Conferences, Administrative Meetings, Fire Safety and Infection Control Meetings, not to mention one time and ad hoc committee meetings. One can see from this that a great investment is placed on the prospective value of meetings as means toward achieving organizational goals.

Considering the time and monetary investment made in meetings it seems wise for a supervisor to utilize all the appropriate strategies he or she can implement, in order to meetings productive, goal directed and satisfying experiences for all participants.

## II. DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

Under democratic leadership only certain circumstances call for leadership being based upon higher authority such as statute or stated policy. The leadership consistently seeks consensus of the group. Democratic leaders tend to be concerned with humanistic priorities through objective evaluation and seeking all sides of issues and tolerates differences within the group. Within democratic leadership strategy disagreement in the group is expected and instrumental to discussions. The individual leaders create a high level of trust while developing and seeking common understanding and solutions to problems.[2]

The research has shown that leaders often evidence higher levels of the following qualities than other group members: intelligence, scholarship, social activity, dependability in assuming responsibilities and socio-economic background. It has also been found that these characteristics become evident when certain situations call for these qualities to be used. Therefore, the type of democratic leadership used often depends upon the demands of the situation.[3]

There are some unique qualities for democratic leaders as opposed to other types of leadership which prefer some other type of management style. The democratic leader tends to be well-adjusted and has human concerns. The leader is sensitive to the group while he or she understands the problems facing the group. While being able to articulate the group's positions, the individual leader tends to restrain himself. Two personal characteristics of democratic leaders are the evidence of high levels of energy, combined with a mellowness that allows the

democratic process to take place.

The advantages of democratic leadership to operate within all levels of any organization are especially important for any management team. If individuals participate in the decision-making process they more fully understand the decision and will more strongly support it for a more extended period of time. The process maximizes human resources, while developing self-reliant members who will not be at a loss to make a decision when a leader is not available. The members tend to have a higher level of morale because it allows individuals to disagree by expressing opposition before a decision is made. These differences among the individuals within the group allows the decision to be changed to adjust to constantly changing needs.

In general, under democratic leadership the method of the decision-making process is as important as the particular decision itself. This process most often occurs within some sort of meeting structure. Therefore, the importance of using meetings within a democratic leadership becomes extremely significant for the operation of the management team.[4]

## III. THE DECISION TO HOLD A MEETING

Bearing in mind that seventy-percent of a top manager's time is spent in meetings,[5] the manager must make sure that his goals cannot be achieved as well or better by other means: by phone-calls, memos, individual conferences, and/or an individual decision.

Committees are sometings created to delay action or pass the buck when a leader doesn't want to make a decision - to "keep minutes but waste hours". There can be a diffusion of responsibility and resultant problems due to inadequate follow-up. Decisions may be more risky because one individual isn't responsible. An individual decision is more likely to be firm rather than a compromise, and an individual is better suited to handling subtle relations. In group decision-making there is always the danger of a weak compromise decision or tyranny of the minority due to politeness or mutual respect, or because the minority may hold out and the majority may give in due to a lack of time, interest or sense of responsibility.[6] Diverse information may widen the scope of the problem, thus making the problem more complex due to confusing variables, and thereby compromise the quality of a solution.

The greatest controversy about whether or not to use groups for organizational decision-making hovers over three concerns: whether group decision-making will lead to decisions which are popular from management's point of view; whether group decision-making is really a process of unfair manipulation; and whether group decision-making is more effective than individual decision-making.

The committee meeting can be either standing, with a formal place in the organization; or temporary, for a specific purpose, and disbanded as soon as its objective

ccomplished. A committee for group decision-making is a cluster of three or more people, at any level of the organization, on whom the responsibility of choosing between alternatives and making a decision is thrust. It is a form of delegation and subject to the limitation of same.[7]

The group decision-making process is of most value when management is more concerned with getting acceptance of a decision than with the quality of the decision. Groups are best at solving a crossword puzzle, while the individual is best at inventing one.[8] The time spent in meetings may pay off in planning the implementation of changes in the organizational structure and/or processes. Dependent on the nature of the group, the solution is more likely to produce a balanced point of view; more information may make a decision more rational and the efficiency of specialization can be brought to bear on the problem. With respect to cost effectiveness, well managed group attention to a problem is believed to be more efficient than individual decision-making in terms of man hours.[9]

## IV. PLANNING THE MEETING

The work of a meeting does not occur solely at the meeting. Once the decision to hold a meeting is made, the leader will often spend more time in preparing an agenda and planning strategy than he(she) will spend at the meeting itself.

Before preparing the agenda, the leader ideally asks prospective participants to submit their suggestions for agenda items along with suggested time limits, who should be present, and appropriate supporting documentation. The leader then weighs the relative importance of topics and establishes priorities from the most important to the least important items for discussion. Too many objectives will result in no subject receiving concentrated attention. If the group meets regularly, topics of priority can also be identified at the end of the previous meeting.[10] The

agenda, which could also be called pre-meeting minutes, should reflect what is expected to be accomplished and define goals and possible ways to accomplish goals. The agenda should be separated into action items first and exploratory discussion items second.

Send the agenda to all planned participants a week in advance along with copies of supportive documentation for study. Set up a time during the least hectic or least productive time of day; and if the meeting is an important planning meeting, it is a good idea to hold it away from the facility or office to a completely different and relaxed atmosphere.

Participant selection may very well be the most critical element in productive group interaction. Limit the participants to those who have formal authority to make decisions, have adequate knowlege of issues at hand, have proper judgment and/or can provide information. Formal status systems can inhibit social interaction, so it is most effective to match the degree of expertise with desired degree of participation and influence.[11]

Studies have been done to support the productive value of both heterogenous and homogenous groups. A homogenous group can be created by bringing together persons with similar personalities, value orientations, attitudes toward supervision, or predispositions to accept or reject fellow members. Heterogeneity is induced by creating negative expectations regarding potential contributions by fellow members, bringing together different personality types, and by creating sub-groups. Studies by Hare and a study by Shultz, supported by several other researchers, compared the characteristics of cooperatively organized and competitively organized groups. They found that within homogenous groups there was stronger individual motivation to complete a task and stronger feelings of obligation toward other members existed; a greater division of labor both in content and frequency of interaction among members with greater coordination of effort was present and there was more effective inter-member communication. There was more

friendliness expressed among members, more satisfaction with the product expressed, and greater speed in solving a problem. In short, homogenous groups were significantly more productive than heterogenous groups in terms of personalness, counter-personalness, degree of conservatism, managerial personality traits and congeniality. Studies by Hoffman and Ziller, on the other hand, found heterogenous groups to be more productive than homogenous groups and produced significantly superior solutions. One can resolve this conflict by reasoning that, "The advantage of heterogeneity depends upon the negative effects of heterogenous attitudes on interpersonal cooperation (of a high level) to produce ideas and screen them for their quality."[12] The conclusions of a combined laboratory and field experiment by Blither in 1971 reflected the realistic complexity of problems and their relationship to members' personalities:

> The results of this research suggest that the greater the degree to which individuals in a task group involved in complex decision making process skills enable them to deal effectively with other group members, the greater will be the success of the group. This in no way implies that groups homogenous in need patterns will be more successful than heterogenous groups. Neither does it imply that individuals who like one another will be more successful in a group than any other mixture of individuals. Thus the common remark, "I dont't have to like him - I just have to work with him" may contain a good deal of truth.
>
> A second implication of the research is that the degree to which individuals in the group possess needs for dominance will have a powerful effect upon the structure of the group. In addition, a limited amount of evidence is presented which suggests that the personality need-dispositions of the most dominant individual in the group may have great influence on the success of the group. Although the evidence is limited, it appears that if the dominant individual has a high need for recognition and a low need for autonomy, the group is more likely to be successful. Finally, the degree to which the dominant individual possesses skills in social intelligence is likely to influence the success of the group positively...[13]

Another aspect of importance to consider when planning a meeting is group size. Small groups tend to engage in superficial discussion and avoid controversial subjects; possibly because they are afraid of alienating other members. In groups of three, two participants can form a coalition against the third and become an overpowerful majority. As member numbers increase, there are limits to a leader's ability to attend to both the group process and individuals within the group. "...the ability of the observing individual to perceive, keep track of, and judge each member separately in a social interaction situation may not extend much beyond the size of six or seven..."[14] Below are characteristics of various group sizes as found in a number of studies:

> Groups of two to five members achieve consensus more readily than do larger groups. (Manners, 1975; Hare, 1952)
>
> Groups of five to eleven members tend to make more accurate decisions than do groups beyond either end of the range. (Manners, 1975; Ziller, 1957; Thomas and Fink, 1963)
>
> Groups of four to five members foster greater member satisfaction than occurs in groups of other sizes. (Slater, 1958; Hackman and Vidman, 1970)
>
> Larger groups generate more ideas but as group size increases, the number of ideas relative to the number of members decreases due to social obstacles. (Collins and Grutzkow, 1964; Gibb, 1951)[15]

If consensus is of primary importance, keep the meeting to two to five participants; and if the quality of the decision is most important, five to eleven participants is best. Groups of five seem to be ideal. In a study by Slater; "Size five emerged clearly...as the size group which from the subjects' viewpoint was most effective in dealing with an intellectual task involving the collection and exchange of information about a situation, the coordination, analysis and evaluation of this information, and a group decision regarding the appropriate administrative action to be taken in the situation..."[16]

The physical arrangement of the meeting room will also play a role in the kinds of relationships that occur at a meeting. When information on charts, etc. must be conveyed, seating should be arranged to focus on the information. A leader sitting at the head of an oblong board table can be imposing and serve to inhibit communication, but this position can be effective when the leader wnats to dominate.[17] When seating isn't pre-assigned, the informal leaders can be detected because they occupy positions at or next to the ends of tables significantly more often than other members. (Strodbeck and Hook, 1961; Howells and Becker, 1962). The informal leaders also tend to occupy positions the greatest mean distance from other group members (Steinzor, 1950). Equidistant, neutral spacing patterns for seating were shown to produce the following characteristics to a greater degree than leadership centered groups. (Cummings, et al, 1974)

1. Better quality decisions
2. Speedier solutions
3. Greater consensus[18]

Planning for a meeting has been complete when participants have been selected; an agenda has been circulated containing topics for discussion, objectives, time frame , place, names of participants, and supportive documentation; seating has been arranged and strategy planned for conducting the meeting. The remainder of this paper will deal with leadership strategies for bringing about consensus and high quality decisions.

## V. LEADING THE GROUP DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

It is recommended that the meeting be opened with brief introductory remarks and pleasantries and then move quickly to a statement of problems. Delay sets a bad precedent, rewards latecomers and penalizes participants who must waste valuable work time. Assign a timekeeper to monitor agenda deadlines as an assist in controlling time. Make sure there are no deviations from the agenda and stop at each juncture to recap and summarize, making sure that all participants support a decision, and agree on due date and action plan. After the agenda is covered, the leader may open the meeting to other business on the agenda. If the meeting is long, include occasional breaks. Signs of fatigue are the low volumes of speaking tones, folded arms, fidgeting, and sitting sideways. End the meeting on time and save adequate time to recap and restate recommendations, evaluate whether the original objective was realized, and clarify what was agreed on.[19]

After the meeting, concise in-depth minutes of decisions made and actions to be taken, by whom and when, should ideally be distributed within twenty-four hours in memo form. This reaffirms the importance of the meeting and reduces errors of memory. Also include a short report on any progress that has been made since the last meeting and what is being worked on and any additional documents that may assist accomplishment of the meeting's planned goals. Minutes may include:

Addressee
Who from
Date of memo
Specific subjects
Date of meeting
Names of attendees (May include address and phone)
Notice of next meeting
Agenda of next meeting
Names of recipients of copies of minutes

## AFTER MEETING EVALUATION*

Ask yourself the following questions after each meeting to determine its effectiveness with relationship to group process, productivity and cost.

1. Was the meeting really necessary?
2. Was an agenda distributed?
3. Did participants have input into the agenda?
4. Were supportive documents distributed?
5. Was the agenda followed?
6. Were your desired results accomplished?
7. Did the meeting start and stop on time?
8. Was the time convenient to those involved?
9. Were the right people to deal with the issues in attendance?
10. Were goals clearly defined?
11. Did topics end with conclusions or decisions?
12. Were follow-up actions assigned?
13. Was time wasted?
14. Were all participants involved?
15. Was order maintained?
16. Were procedures followed?
17. Were accurate records kept and minutes distributed?
18. Was the meeting cost effective? (Consider both direct labor costs and "opportunity costs" for productive work that could have been done elsewhere.)

20

*From "Management for Meetings", Small Business Report, November 1980, p.19.

What kind of leadership affects the best group decision-making? Studies by Berkowitz and Schlesinger, Jackson and Butman, have shown that in task-oriented decision-making groups, directive influence by the leader produces greater participant satisfaction but that the leadership depended upon group acceptance.[21] For example, it should work to state to a committee, "We've got to lay off twenty people. Who should they be?" This is equivalent to asking a patient if he wants a mineral oil or soap suds enema. The group looks to the leader, instead, to set limits. This enables the leader from encroaching on decision-making areas that aren't the group's concern. For example, a leader could say, "How much money should we spend?", but the group would probably be unable to come up with a figure or a realistic figure. More appropriately, the leader could state, "We have $500.00 allowed us. How should we spend it?"[22] The leader would express his(her) opinions, but let it be simultaneously known that he is willing to subject those opinions to constructive criticism and suggestions. Silence may be interpreted to mean that the leader cannot make a decision for himself.

The effective committee chairperson...

- understands group process.
- knows the objectives of the committee and understands the problem at hand.
- is able to vary decision strategies according to the nature of the task and the feelings of group members.
- has achieved acceptance of the group members and their confidence in his/her personal integrity.
- has the skill to resist needless debate and defer discussion on issues not pertinent or where there is a lack of information.[23]

It is the group leader's task to find out from the other participants what they "think" the issues are in order to learn whether they understand them as they

truly are and to elicit input from all participants in order to achieve a genuine consensus. In order to achieve the latter, various control methods are employed, dependent upon participant characteristics. Some participants are eager and valuable, but tend to dominate as do the more capricious individuals. Well defined organizational procedures tend to eliminate this problem on most occasions.[24] The eager, helpful dominator needs careful handling to get him to give up the floor without hurting his feelings. The non-participant can often be coaxed to contribute by directly asking him(her) open-ended questions at or near the beginning of the meeting, using eye contact, or asking each member to render an opinion in turn. The negative participant may be either rude or a heckler, will often talk on the side and do paperwork.

HANDLING A HECKLER

- Address specific questions of a heckler. Look straight at him/her.
- Look calm.
- Enlist the help of friendly group members by asking questions that bring in other viewpoints.
- Ask the heckler what he/she recommends. Meet with a potential heckler prior to the meeting to ask opinions and let the person air viewpoints.
- Bring hostility into the open at the beginning of the meeting by calmly stating that a difference of opinion exists. Convey respect for all opinions. This can lead to a concentrated group effort to understand opposing views.[25]

## VI. ACHIEVING CONSENSUS WITH CONFLICT

Conflict is not always presented as overt aggression nor is latent conflict necessarily perceived or felt.

Five Stages of Conflict

1. Latent conflict - inherent in conditions of the situation
2. Perceived conflict - cognitive knowlege
3. Felt conflict - affective
4. Manifest conflict - behavior
5. Conflict Aftermath - conditions of the situation after the overt (manifest) episode.

The resolution of overt conflict (conflict aftermath) results in a different atmosphere for subsequent episodes. Group process is best served by a leader who can recognize conflict early and lead the group in dealing with differences openly in an atmosphere of acceptance without the disruptive effects of felt and manifest conflict.

Conflict can be both constructive and destructive. In fact, no group can be completely without conflict, so the issue becomes the degree and type of conflict present. A more open value system will produce more divergent opinions, with no decision as a highly potential result. The least effective group in conflict is one in which participants are closed-minded and possess diverse value systems. The most effective group in conflict is one in which participants are open-minded with diverse value systems. In the presence of diverse value systems in conflict, no solution may actually be the best approach. Consensus means the adoption of the most acceptable solution to all participants, but is not necessarily optimal. Unanimity, on the other hand, particularly in problem solving tasks where there is a single correct answer, has been shown to be more effective than individual decision-making, averaging techniques,

or other group decision-making techniques.[26]

Many people would say that voting is a democratic way to make decisions, but it can be argued that voting tends to enhance differences among the group participants, and once a member has publicly committed himself to a position by voting, it isn't always easy for him to change his mind and save face. Also, if he is a member of the losing minority, he cannot be expected to follow through on the majority decision with much enthusiasm. Therefore, wherever possible, it is advisable not to take a formal vote and work, instead, toward a roughly unanimous solution.[27]

Guidelines To Use In Achieving Consensus*

1. Avoid arguing for your own rankings. Present your position as lucidly and logically as possible, but listen to the other members' reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point.

2. Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for the next-most-acceptable alternative for all parties.

3. Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict and to reach agreement and harmony. When agreement seems to come too quickly and easily, be suspicious. Explore the reasons and be sure everyone accepts the solution for basically similar or complementary reasons. Yield only to positions that have objective and logically sound foundations.

4. Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as majority vote, averages, coin-flips and bargaining. When a dissenting member finally agrees, don't feel that he must be rewarded by having his own way at some later point.

5. Differences of opinion are natural and expected. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can help the group's decision because with a wide range of information and opinions, there is a greater chance that the group will hit upon more adequate solutions.

* From: J. Hall, "Decisions", Psychology Today, November 1971.

## VII. GROUPTHINK AND GROUPTHINK PREVENTION

Although cohesiveness in a group improves productivity and provides acceptance and support to individual members, when the group becomes insulated from qualified outsiders and the leader is able to promote his/her favored solution, "group-think" is a very real danger. Groupthink results when the desire for uniformity and consensus is stronger than the desire for accuracy and correctness - In other words, it is excessive like-mindedness.[28] When a participant is independent and strikes out on his own path, he does not, as a rule, give in to the majority in the face of unrealistic alternatives. However, those participants who choose the path of compliance at the outset, are usually unable to extricate themselves from the flow of decision-making, even when those decisions are obviously unrealistic. (Study by Solomon Asch: "Opinions and Social Pressure"). The latter is the case with groupthink.[29]

SYMPTOMS OF GROUPTHINK*

1. an illusion of invulnerability, shared by most or all the members, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks;

2. collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings which might lead the members to reconsider their assumptions before they recommit themselves to their past policy decisions;

3. an unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality, inclining members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions.

4. stereotyped views of enemy leaders as too evil to warrant genuine attempts to negotiate, or as too weak and stupid to counter whatever risky attempts are made to defeat their purpose.

5. direct pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group's stereotypes, illusions, or committments, making clear that this type of dissent is contrary to what is expected of all loyal members;

6. self-censorship of deviations from the apparent group consensus, reflecting each member's inclination to minimize to himself the importance of his doubts and counterarguments.

7. a shared illusion of unanimity concerning judgments conforming to the majority view (partly resulting from self-censorship of deviations, augmented by the false assumption that silence means consent);

8. the emergence of self-appointed mindguards - members who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions.

*From: Irving L. Janis, Victims of Groupthink. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972, pp. 197-198.

Irving Janis proposes nine approaches to the prevention of the groupthink phenomenon as described below.

> 1. "The leader of a policy-forming group should assign the role of critical evaluator to each member, encouraging the group to give high priority to airing objections and doubts. This practice needs to be reinforced by the leader's acceptance of criticism of his own judgments in order to discourage the members from soft-pedaling their disagreements."

The above approach will not work unless the leader conveys by his/her own actions that the task of critical appraisal should be given priority over traditional forms of deference, and demonstrate that he can be influenced by those who disagree with him. The drawbacks are that disruptive quarrels and demoralizing statements must be mediated by the leader.

> 2. "The leader in an organization's hierarchy, when assigning a policy-planning mission to a group, should be impartial instead of stating preferences and expectations at the outset. This practice requires each leader to limit his briefings to unbiased statements about the scope of the problem and the limitations of available resources, without advocating specific proposals he would like to see adopted. This allows the conferees the opportunity to develop an atmosphere of open inquiry and to explore impartially a wide range of policy alternatives."

The latter approach avoids setting up a group norm that produces conformity with the leader's viewpoints. A hazard of this is a rift between members and the leader when consensus is contrary to the leader's viewpoints. The leader must be truly open-minded and value the judgments of group members enough to not use his power when consensus isn't going his way.

> 3. "The organization should **routinely follow the** administrative practice of setting up several independent policy-planning and evaluation groups to work on the same policy question, each carrying out its deliberations under a different leader."

This approach prevents insulation of a group from outside independent judgments. It does, however, pose a security risk and permits greater opportunity for organizational politics to play a determining role. The task also tends to become so diffuse that no one takes the responsibility for making critical evaluation; making it almost essential, therefore, that the responsibilities of each group be specified and the role of each participant be defined.

> 4. "Throughout the period when the feasibility and effectiveness of policy alternatives are being surveyed, the policy making group should from time to time divide into two or more subgroups to meet separately, under different chairmen, and then come together to hammer out their differences."

> 5. "Each member of the policy-making group should discuss periodically the group's deliberations with trusted associates in his own unit of the organization and report back their reactions."

The latter approach can be helpful, provided associates can be trusted to adhere to security regulations, and that they will have somewhat different attitudes, expertise and values in order to come up with some fresh viewpoints on the situation.

> 6. "One or more outside experts or qualified colleagues within the organization who are not core members of the policy-making group should be invited to each meeting on a staggered basis and should be encouraged to challenge the views of the core members."

The above approach counteracts a false sense of security about risky decision, but requires that truly well-qualified visitors are invited. Open discussion should be deferred until after the visitor has had a chance to speak about any qualms he or she may have.

> 7. "At every meeting devoted to evaluating policy alternatives, at least one member should be assigned the role of devil's advocate."

The leader must take care to avoid tokenism in the "devil's advocate" technique. Performers of the devil's advocate role should be persons who can effectively raise new issues and questions in a non-threatening, low-key style. By rotating the performer, domestication of the role can be avoided as well as the alienation of the performer from colleagues when outside the meeting room.

> 8. "Whenever the policy issue involves relations with a rival nation or organization, a sizable bloc of time (perhaps an entire session) should be spent surveying all warning signals from the rivals and constructing alternative scenarios of the rival's intentions."

This helps counteract shared illusions of invulnerability, and overcome the influence of stereotypes and complacency.

> 9. "After reaching a preliminary consensus about what seems to be the best policy alternative, the policy-making group should hold a "second chance" meeting at which every member is expected to express as vividly as he can all his residual doubts and to rethink the entire issue before making a difinitive choice."

A premature consensus based on unwarranted expectations is prevented in this way. Every member plays the devil's advocate at this meeting. It should preferably take place in a relaxed atmosphere away from the usual meeting place, and possibly over drinks, in order to reveal vague reservations about the decision.[30]

The application of Janis' techniques should be done after careful evaluation of the group's characteristics and the task to be carried out. They are by no means to be considered a empirically proven fool-proof formulas for stimulating effective group decision-making. They are, instead, examples of methods that have been successful in the past for counteracting initial biases of members, preventing "pluralistic ignorance", and eradicating other sources of error that may arise independent of the groupthink phenomenum.

Two techniques have been developed that have been proven to prevent the adverse effects of individual dominance, groupthink, and personality clashes. They are the Delphi Technique (Dalkey, 1969), and the Nominal Group Technique (Delbecq, Van de Ven, Gustafson, 1975). These techniques will be presented in outline form to give the reader an idea about what each technique entails. Further reading, however, should be done before conducting the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) meeting in particular.

Delphi Technique

A. Eliminates almost all factors other than knowlege from group problem solving by
   1. keeping group membership anonymous and/or...
   2. listing members but keeping specific communications anonymous.
   3. Allowing only written communication. Each member takes a position.
B. The central thrust of those positions is communicated to all members.
C. Members are again asked to modify their positions or not and to give specific written reasons for departing from the central thrust of first round responses. 31
D. This continues for several rounds.

Nominal Group Technique

Participants interact by means of a very carefully controlled procedure.

Step I Silent Generation of Ideas
   A. A nominal question is presented in written form to the group.
   B. The nominal question is then read to the group.
   C. The group is directed to write their ideas in brief statements, each member working independently.

Step II Round Robin Recording of Ideas
   A. On a flip chart visible to the entire group, one idea from each member is recorded as it is read by each member.
   B. Benefits of Round Robin Recording
      1. equal participation in presentation of ideas
      2. Increased attention to problem at hand
      3. separation of ideas from personalities.
      4. increased ability to deal with larger numbers of ideas.
      5. tolerance of conflicting ideas
      6. encouragement of ideas of one member

stimulating the thoughts of another member.
7. the provision of a written record.

Step III Each Idea is Discussed in Turn
A. Discussion is paced by the leader.
B. Benefits of discussing each idea in turn
1. avoid undue focusing on a particular idea
2. Clarifies and eliminates misunderstandings
3. provides logic behind arguments and disagreements
4. records opinion differences without argumentation.

Step IV Preliminary voting on an item of importance
A. Each member writes on a separate sheet of paper the five items he considers most important.
B. Members rank order what they consider to be the five best alternatives from most important to least important. These are written on cards and shuffles before tallying.
C. The mean (x) value of independent judgements is the group's decision.

Step V Discussion of the Preliminary Vote
A. Examines for inconsistent voting patterns.
B. Provides an opportunity to rediscover items which are perceived as receiving too few or too many votes.
C. Involves brief discussion for clarification, not social pressure.

Step VI Final Vote
A. Conducted as for the preliminary vote.
B. Purposes:
1. Determine outcome of meeting.
2. Provide sense of closure and accomplishment.
3. Document group judgment.[32]

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

It is important that a leader analyizes his (her) own administrative style to see if it is conducive to a democratic leadership pattern. One of the best indicators of this question can be found in Appendix A, Consensus Management Readiness Test, by Richard Wynn, of the University of Pittsburgh.

In the final analysis, democratic leadership is not dominated by an individual leader. Successful management teams, while being very cohesive, have a proper balance between the group needs and the individual personal needs. This management approach establishes a high level of communication while allowing for minority points of view in the decision-making process. This process should occur within the structure of the meeting.[33]

Although there is no one formula for conducting effective meetings for group decision-making, the techniques for achieving consensus and preventing groupthink are only as good as the leader who is applying them. Like a fine gourmet chef, the leader must select and evaluate the characteristics and quality of his raw materials on the basis of the dish he wants to produce. He then follows through with his strategy and processes his ingredients through the application of known techniques in a way that is characteristic of his own personality and the circumstances of the environment in which he is working. Thus, the effective management of meetings for group decision-making becomes an art, highly dependent upon the sensitivity, maturity and "presence" of the leader.

Dichotomous view points represented in this paper regarding ideal approaches to group leadership were intended to represent treatments for group situations at various points on the heterogenous-homogenous continuum. It is conceivable that a leader would apply techniques for achieving congeniality among members as well as techniques for groupthink prevention with the same group of participants. The leader must be flexible, understand the stages of group process and not be surprised when conflict or "get the leader" episodes arise. The leader's approaches will vary depending upon the tasks at hand, characteristics of participants and stages of group process.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Gordon Lippitt and Edith Seashore, The Leader and Group Effectiveness. New York: Association Press, 1962, 12-38.

[2]Clarence A. Weber and Mary E. Weber, Fundamentals of Educationational Leadership. New York: Exposition Press Inc. 1961, 61-63.

[3]R. M. Stophill, "Personal Factors Associated with Leadership: A Survey of the Literature," Journal of Psychology. Vol. XXV, January 1948, 35-71.

[4]Franklyn S. Haiman, Group Leadership and Democratic Action. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1951, 30-50.

[5]Gene Mattauck (Publisher), "Management for Meetings," Small Business Report. November, 1980, 15-19.

[6]Theo Haimann, Supervisory Management for Health Care Institutions. St. Louis: The Catholic Hospital Association, 1973, 149.

[7]George Strauss and Leonard Sayles, Personnel: The Human Problems of Management. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1972, 188-190.

[8]Ibid., 189-191.

[9]Haimann, Supervisory Management. 425-427.

[10]Mattauck, Management for Meetings. 15-16.

[11]Maimann, Supervisory Management. 424.

[12]Alan C. Filley, "Committee Management," California Management Review. (reprint), Vol. 13, No. 1, 1970, 20-21.

[13]David R. Hampton and others, Organizational Behavior and the Practice of Management. New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1978, 249.

[14]Filley, "Committee Management". 15.

[15]Hampton, Organizational Behavior. 251.

[16]Filley, "Committee Management". 15.

[17]Mattauck, "Management for Meetings". 16.

[18]Hampton, Organizational Behavior. 252-253.

[19]Mattauck, "Management for Meetings". 16-19.

[20]Ibid., 19.

[21]Filley, "Committee Management". 18.

[22]Strauss and Sayles, Human Problems. 188-189.

[23]Filley, "Committee Management". 16.

[24]Fremont E. Kast and James E. Rosenzweig, Organization and Management: A Systems Approach. New York: McGraw Hill, 1974, 127.

[25]Mattauck, "Management for Meetings". 17-18.

[26]Kast, Organizational Management. 317, 424, 455.

[27]Haimann, Supervisory Management. 160.

[28]Hampton, Organizational Behavior. 255-256.

[29]Kast, Organizational Management. 428.

[30]Irving L. Janis, "Preventing Groupthink," in Organizational Behavior and the Practice of Management. Edited by David R. Hampton, New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1978, 277-283.

[31]Hampton, Organizational Behavior. 257-258.

[32]Andre L. Delbecq and others, Group Techniques for Program Planning. New York: Scott Foresman and Co., 1975, 40-66.

[33]Lippitt and Seashore, The Leader and Group Effectiveness. Op. Cit..

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# CONSENSUS MANAGEMENT READINESS TEST

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University of Pittsburgh

Consensus management is a sophisticated and refined form of what is more commonly called "shared decision making", "administrative team", or "participative management". This instrument is designed to test readiness for consensus management in school organizations and to focus attention upon various personal or organizational characteristics that may need rehabilitation before consensus management is undertaken.

The results of this readiness test will be no more meaningful than the degree of objectivity or honesty which you can invest in it. It might be helpful if you would "step out of yourself" and, if you can answer the questions as you think the majority of persons in your administrative organization would answer them, since their perception is probably the reality that the group must work with. Do not do this however in part B.

If you are a central office administrator, think of the terms "people I work with", "meetings that I commonly attend", and "our organization", etc., as the district-wide entity. If you are a building level administrator, you must make a choice of consistently dealing with such terms in this instrument at either the building level or district level, wherever the question of readiness is most pertinent for you.

Place a check mark on the space following each statement in the column which represents your perception of the statement.

| | very uncommon | fairly uncommon | uncertain or variable | fairly common | very common |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. MY PERSONALITY | | | | | |
| 1. I hate to admit it when I don't have a solution to a a problem. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 2. I don't like it when subordinates disagree with me. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 3. I hate to lose an argument. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 4. I enjoy discussing controversial issues with people whose opinions differ from mine. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 5. I like to be alone when I must mull over difficult problems. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 6. I have a high tolerance for frustration and ambiguity in organizational life. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 7. I can keep my cool and not communicate tension or anxiety during controversy. | — | — | — | — | — |
| B. MY VIEW OF PEOPLE | | | | | |
| 8. Frank discussion of controversial issues is healthy in school organization. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 9. Most people are not willing to assume the risks inherent in making difficult decisions. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 10. Most problems that can be tackled by a group can be better handled solo by an able member of the group. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 11. Although most people like to discuss controversial issues, not many people like to accept the responsibility for decisions. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 12. My opinions are usually superior to those of my professional peers. | — | — | — | — | — |

| | very uncommon | fairly uncommon | uncertain or variable | fairly common | very common |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. Most people are happier in a group that has a strong and assertive leader than they are in a group where leadership is more evenly shared. | | | | | |
| 14. Too much openness and candor in the discussion of sensitive issues is dysfunctional. | | | | | |
| 15. When disagreement arises in a group, the leader should take a firm stand. | | | | | |
| 16. When school people are committed to agreed-upon goals, it is not necessary to supervise them closely. | | | | | |
| C. MY STYLE | | | | | |
| 17. I can disagree with people without being personally disagreeable. | | | | | |
| 18. I encourage and draw out people who may disagree with what has been stated. | | | | | |
| 19. People like to attend meetings that I preside over. | | | | | |
| 20. When a group fails to reach a consensus, I am comfortable with a majority opinion accompanied by a minority opinion. | | | | | |
| 21. I do not change my mind very often after hearing a group discuss a difficult problem or issue. | | | | | |
| 22. I recommend for administrative positions people with divergent views and values. | | | | | |
| 23. I tend to present and define issues in goal-oriented rather than person-oriented terms. | | | | | |

| | very uncommon | fairly uncommon | uncertain or variable | fairly common | very commo |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24. I am reluctant to disagree with my superiors. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 25. In a small group discussion, I tend to talk more than most people do. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 26. I invite and receive opinions that are critical of the organization. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 27. In small groups I commonly ask for opinions of people who have not spoken. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 28. I really listen carefully when my professional peers speak to important problems. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 29. Meetings are more effective when discussion of problems is limited in time, a vote is taken, and the next problem then addressed. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 30. When I am confronted with a difficult issue, I feel determined to get it resolved quickly and decisively. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 31. I play the "devil's advocate" in expressing views that I do not necessarily hold in order to test those views with the group. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 32. I work hard at trying to understand the position of people who disagree with me. | — | — | — | — | — |
| D. MY MILIEU | | | | | |
| 33. There is a lot of conviviality and laughter in meetings of people with whom I work closely. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 34. My immediate superior(s) can be trusted. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 35. Administrative rank on our staff is discernible by the order and manner in which people participate in group discussion. | — | — | — | — | — |

| | very uncommon | fairly uncommon | uncertain or variable | fairly common | very common |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 36. In meetings of people with whom I work, much of the discussion is addressed to the presiding person rather than to the group in general. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 37. The people with whom I work most closely really care about each other. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 38. The people with whom I work most closely are a competent group. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 39. Our ranks are so "thin" numerically, that time for meetings is at a real premium. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 40. Decisions that emerge from the groups I meet with are the decisions that the presiding authority figure preferred in the first place. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 41. "Hidden agendas" exist in meetings that I commonly attend. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 42. In meetings that I attend at school, any member of the group can get matters on the agenda. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 43. The final decisions that emerge from groups that I regularly participate in is the decision that the majority of the group would favor. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 44. A lot of suspicion prevails at meetings that I commonly attend at school. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 45. People do not leave meetings that I commonly attend at school without having had an opportunity to speak their minds. | — | — | — | — | — |

| | very uncommon | fairly uncommon | uncertain or variable | fairly common | very common |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 46. There is a spirit of trust among people with whom I work most closely. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 47. The most important issues and problems facing our organization do not seem to be faced openly in our meetings. | — | — | — | — | — |
| 48. The school board in our district is committed to open meetings, invites participation of people in its deliberation, and listens carefully to what is said. | — | — | — | — | — |

## SCORING INSTRUCTION

In items 4,6,7,8,16,17,18,19,20,22,23,26,27,28,31,32,33,34,37,38,42,43,45,46, and 48, number each set of blanks 1 to 5 from left to right. In all others, number the blanks 5 to 1 from left to right.

Total the scores in section A and divide by 7 = _____ MY PERSONALITY

Total the scores in section B and divide by 9 = _____ MY VIEW OF PEOPLE

Total the socres in section C and divide by 16 = _____ MY STYLE

Total the scores in section D and divide by 16 = _____ MY MILIEU

Average scores of 4.0 to 5.0 suggest a high degree of readiness for consensus management insofar as each of the four variables is concerned. A score of 3.0 to 3.9 suggests limited readiness and proceede with caution along with a deliberate effort toward remediation on weak items. A score of less than 3.0 suggests a serious lack of readiness for consensus management until more readiness in self and/or the group has been generated.